

U.S. SUPPORTS FREE, FAIR AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

DHAKA, 5 JANUARY -- The United States has long recognized and welcomed Bangladesh's strong democratic traditions. Elections that are free, fair and credible are a critical part of any democracy. Past elections in Bangladesh were generally acknowledged to meet internationally recognized standards of fairness.

The voters of Bangladesh deserve a choice. We regret that the Awami League and its alliance partners intend to boycott the election. We urge them to reconsider and to offer the voters a chance to choose.

Elections need to take place in an open, peaceful atmosphere with the participation of all political parties so that the voters can have confidence in the outcome. The process as it is unfolding certainly shows many imperfections. We urge the Caretaker Government and the Election Commission to act swiftly and impartially to create conditions under which all parties can participate. Our own support and observation missions will depend on whether such conditions are created. Likewise, we call on all parties to set aside narrow, partisan agendas and join together in serious, constructive dialogue to create an acceptable environment for participation by all major parties in the elections.

Violence has no place in a democratic society. While political protest is an integral part of democracy, violence is not. We praise the political leaders for the restraint they have shown and we call on all parties to reject violence, conduct themselves peacefully, and refrain from provocation.

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